DECISION
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR
"MANAGEMENT OF WOLF CONFLICTS AND DEPREDATING WOLVES IN WISCONSIN"

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) program responds to requests for assistance from individuals, organizations and agencies experiencing damage caused by wildlife. WS is the federal program authorized by Congress and directed by law to reduce damage caused by wildlife (Act of March 2, 1931 (46 Stat. 1486; 7 U.S.C. 426-426c)), as amended in the Fiscal Year 2001 Agriculture Appropriations Bill. Wildlife damage management is the alleviation of damage or other problems caused by or related to the presence of wildlife and recognized as an integral part of wildlife management (The Wildlife Society 1992). The imminent threat of damage or loss of resources is often deemed sufficient for wildlife damage management actions to be initiated (U.S. District Court of Utah 1993). WS generally uses an Integrated Wildlife Damage Management (IWDM) approach in which a combination of methods may be used or recommended to reduce damage. Resource management agencies and individuals are required to request WS activities (*i.e.*, damage management actions to protect human health and safety, agricultural resources, and property). All Wisconsin WS wolf damage management is in compliance with relevant laws, regulations, policies, orders and procedures, including the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (J. Smith, USFWS letter to D. Nelson, WS, August 12, 2003; L. Lewis, USFWS letter to G. Larson, WS, May 9, 2001). WS wildlife damage management is implemented based on application of the WS Decision Model (Slate et al. 1992, USDA 1997, WS Directive 2.201).

Ordinarily, according to APHIS procedures implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), individual wildlife damage management actions are categorically excluded (7 CFR 372.5(c), 60 Fed. Reg. 6000-6003, 1995). To evaluate and determine if any potentially significant impacts to the human environment from WS' planned and proposed wolf damage management program would occur, this environmental assessment (EA) was prepared. The EA analyzes the potential environmental and social effects for resolving wolf nuisance and damage problems related to the protection of agricultural resources, property and reducing potential threats to human health and safety on private and public lands in Wisconsin. A pre-decisional EA was released by WS in August 2003 for a 30-day comment period. The pre-decisional EA documents the need for wolf damage management in Wisconsin and assessed potential impacts of various alternatives for responding to damage problems. WS' proposed action is to implement an Adaptive Integrated Wolf Damage Management program on all land classes in Wisconsin when requested. Comments from the public involvement process were reviewed for substantial issues and alternatives, which were considered in developing the Pre-decisional EA and this Decision.

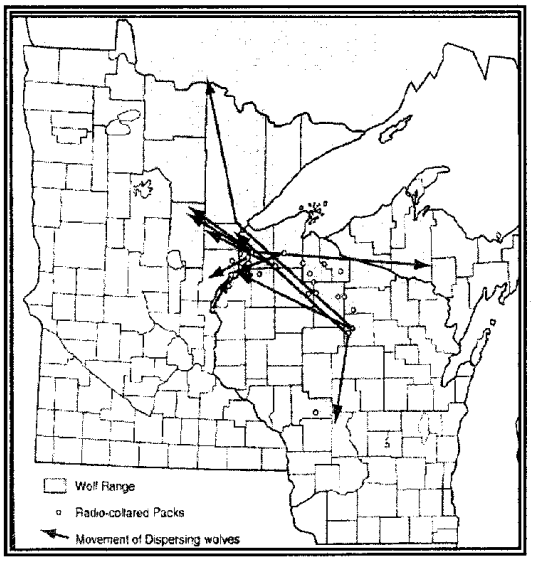
Background

The original distribution of gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) covered most of the Northern Hemisphere and wolves are not restricted to specific habitat types (Pimlott 1975, Mech 1982). The decline in numbers in the United States progressed rapidly, starting from the east and moving westward. By about 1900 the species had disappeared from the eastern half of the United States except for the upper Great Lakes region, and by about

1930 most wolf populations in the west were almost completely gone. Then occurred what Nowak (1983) referred to as "one of the most remarkable wildlife comebacks in history." Wolves spread back into formerly occupied ranges from Alaska to the Great Lakes.

Gray wolves occurred throughout Wisconsin prior to European settlement. However, they were extirpated from southern Wisconsin by the 1880's and central Wisconsin by 1914. A remaining wolf population occurred in a few northern Wisconsin counties, but had declined to fewer than 50 animals by 1950. The last Wisconsin wolf was probably killed in the late 1950's (Wydeven et al. 1995).

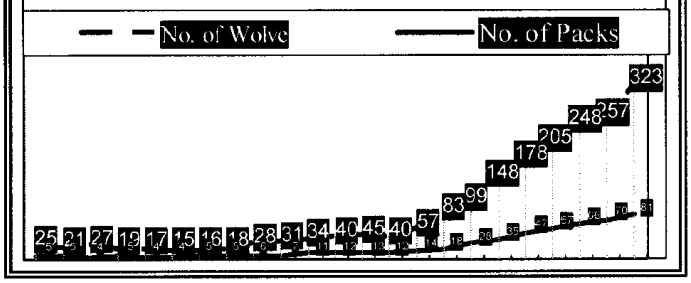
Figure 1. Dispersal of Wisconsin Wolves



In 1974 the gray wolf in the contiguous 48 states was listed as endangered under provisions of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). A Federal *"Recovery Plan for the Eastern Timber Wolf"*, approved in 1978 and revised in 1992, stated that a primary objective is to reestablish viable populations in as much of its former range as possible (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 1992). Under the protections of the ESA, wolf populations in Wisconsin and Minnesota freely disperse (Figure 1). Wolf population monitoring by Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) began in 1979 with an estimated a population of 25 wolves in five packs at the time, and in 2002, the WDNR estimated there were 323 wolves in 81 packs in Wisconsin (Figure 2).

In 1986, the WDNR created a Wolf Recovery Team to develop a Wisconsin Wolf Recovery Plan. A Recovery Plan was approved by the WDNR in 1989. This plan followed the intent of the Federal Recovery Plan and supported reclassification of the wolf in Wisconsin from *"endangered"* to *"threatened"* when a minimum population of 80 animals was maintained for three consecutive years. The Wisconsin recovery goals were achieved in 1997, and in 1999 wolves were officially reclassified to "threatened" by the state. The 2003 wolf population was estimated at 335 (328 outside Indian reservations) animals by the WDNR. Wolf numbers in Wisconsin have greatly surpassed recovery goals identified in the Federal and State recovery plans.

Figure 2. Wolf Population and Wolf Packs in Wisconsin from 1980 to 2002.



On April 1, 2003, the USFWS changed the classification of the gray wolf in the Eastern DPS from endangered to threatened (50 CFR 17.40(o)). The USFWS also established three distinct population segments (DPS) for the wolf in the conterminous US. The wolves in Wisconsin are in the Eastern DPS and were down listed from endangered to threatened because of this action (50 CFR 17.40(o)). They also established a new special regulation under section 4(d) of the ESA which applies provision similar to those in Minnesota to most of the Eastern DPS of wolves. The USFWS found that these special rules were necessary and advisable to provide for the conservation of the wolves in the Western and Eastern DPS (50 CFR 17.40(o)).

Affected Environment

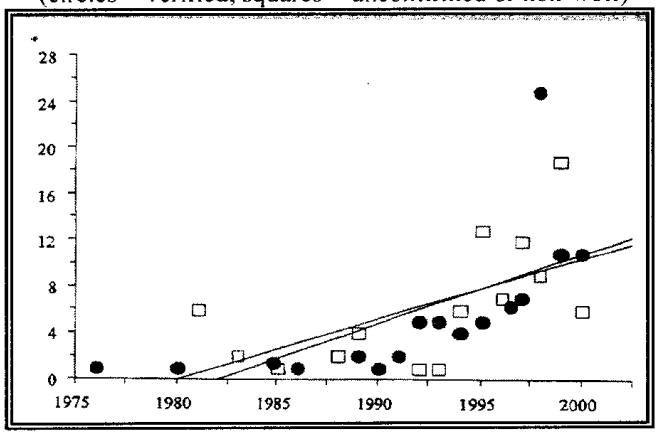
As the historical distribution shows, wolves were not restricted to specific habitats. Wolves ranged from oak (*Quercus* spp.) savannah habitats of Mexico, through prairie in the Great Plains, through the Rocky Mountains, and the boreal forest and tundra regions within the U.S. and Canada. The presence of wolves in an area is dictated by the availability of habitat for its prey species. Availability of suitable habitat for denning is only of secondary importance. However, in forested areas, dens are usually located within 1,600 feet of water-bodies, on elevated knolls.

The area of the proposed action includes all private and public lands in Wisconsin where wolf damage is occurring or could occur. The proposed action could be conducted on urban sites or rural sites when a request is received and a need is present. Goals of the proposed action include the protection of agricultural and natural resources, property, and human and pet health and safety where wolves cause or could cause losses, and also the goal for the conservation of wolves. Cultural, economic, social, legal, and other components of the affected environment are given detailed consideration in the EA.

WS and WDNR Efforts to Reduce Wolf Damage in Wisconsin

Since 1988, WS has cooperated with the WDNR concerning several aspects of wildlife damage management. In 1990, a cooperative agreement was developed which included a provision for reducing damage cause by endangered species, including wolves. Under terms of the current cooperative agreement, WS "*will provide personnel and equipment for depredation control and damage loss appraisal activities for damage by Endangered and Threatened species.*" The number of wolf complaints reported to the Wisconsin WS program has shown an increasing trend (Treves et al. 2002) as the wolf population has increased in the State (Figure 2 and Figure 3). As the wolf population expands in Wisconsin, the need for wolf damage management will also increase to reduce damages and increase human tolerance for wolves (A. P. Wydeven, WDNR, pers. comm. 2003).

Figure 3. Wolf Depredation Complaints in Wisconsin (Treves et al. 2002).
(circles = verified; squares = unconfirmed or non-wolf)



WS conducts field investigations of potential wolf depredations within 48 hours of receipt of a complaint. In accordance with the Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan (WWMP) (1999), WS categorizes each complaint into one of four categories: 1) confirmed depredation, 2) probable depredation, 3) confirmed non-wolf depredation, and 4) unconfirmed depredation. Under the current program, WS may provide technical assistance to producers as appropriate, or upon request by WDNR, WS live-traps at or near verified (confirmed or probable) depredation sites under categorical exclusions (CE), and delivers any wolves captured to WDNR alive.

WS' efforts to alleviate wolf problems have been and will continue to be based on a combination of technical assistance and operational damage management in an Adaptive IWDM program. The number of significant wolf conflicts in Wisconsin has increased the need to implement operational damage management projects

(Figure 3). In accordance with the WWMP (1999) and the Eastern DPS 4(d) rule (50 CFR 17.40(o)), live-trapping and relocation of problem wolves, and/or live-trapping and euthanizing problem wolves by government officials, including WS, would be allowed.

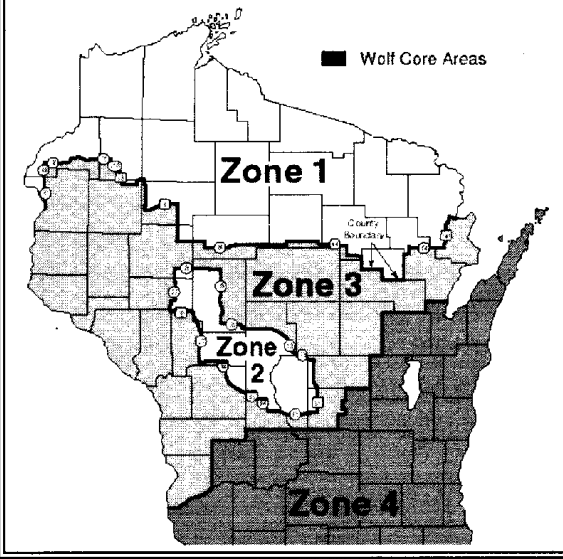
Consistency

Wildlife damage management activities conducted in Wisconsin would be consistent with MOUs and policies of APHIS-WS, the WDNR, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer protection (WDTACP), USFWS, Forest Service, and the EA. In addition, WS completed ESA Section 7 Consultation with the USFWS and the WDNR which determined that WS current and proposed wolf damage management program would have no effect or not likely to adversely affect listed species in Wisconsin (J. Smith, USFWS letter to D. Nelson, WS, August 12, 2003; L. Lewis, USFWS letter to G. Larson, WS, May 9, 2001, S. Holtz, WDRN letter to D. Nelson, WS, March 23, 2002).

Monitoring

The Wisconsin WS program will coordinate any wolf damage management with the WDNR and annually provide to the WDNR the WS take of wolves and non-target animals to help ensure the total statewide take (WS and other take) does not impact the viability of wolves or non-target species populations as determined by the WDNR. WS will also continue to provide program data to WDNR as a participant on the WDNR gray wolf management advisory committee. WS wolf damage management activities could occur across the State, but will primarily occur in Management Zone 1 and Zone 2 (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Wisconsin Wolf Management Zones.



Public Involvement

The WDNR, WDATCP, Wisconsin County Forests Association, USFWS, Forest Service, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), Voigt Task Force and American Indian Tribes found in Wisconsin were invited to participate in the development of this EA and asked to provide issues and concerns for consideration during development of the EA. An invitation for public comment letter containing issues, objectives, preliminary alternatives, and a summary of the need for action was sent to 1395 individuals, agencies, or organizations identified as interested in Wisconsin WS projects. Notice of the proposed action and invitation for public involvement were placed in eight newspapers with circulation throughout Wisconsin in December 2001. WS received 245 public comment letters concerning the preparation of the EA. All letters were reviewed to identify issues and concerns for inclusion in the pre-decisional EA analysis. A pre-decisional EA was released by WS in August 2003 for a 30-day comment period, which assessed potential impacts of various alternatives for responding to wolf damage problems. The pre-decisional EA was sent to 167 entities, including governmental agencies and elected officials, tribes, GLIFWC, and private individuals and organizations interested in the proposed WS wolf damage management program. Notice of the pre-decisional EA was placed in seven newspapers on August 22 to August 25, 2003, including the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*. All comments received from review of the pre-decisional EA were reviewed for issues and concerns prior to reaching a Decision. These letters and

notices are maintained in the administrative file located at the Wisconsin WS State Office, 750 Windsor Street Suite 101, Sun Prairie WI 53590.

Major Issues

Several issues were identified by the Multi-agency Team (*i.e.*, WS, WDNR, WDATCP, USFWS, Forest Service, GLIFWC, Voigt Task Force, and American Indian Tribes) during preparation of the pre-decisional EA. Some were used to prepare the detailed impact analyses of the alternatives in Chapter 4. Some issues were also used to identify mitigation measures and develop SOP's for reducing or eliminating the likelihood of adverse environmental impacts from implementation of the proposed action. Some issues, however, did not receive detailed analyses because WS wolf damage management would not have any adverse affect on the legal, social, or economic environment from program implementation. The following issues were determined to be relevant by WS, WDNR, WDATCP, USFWS, Forest Service, GLIFWC, Voigt Task Force, and American Indian Tribes based on public and other agency comments, and analyzed in detail in Chapter 4 of the EA:

- Viability of gray wolf populations in Wisconsin.
- Public health and safety from wolf management.
- Maintain effective and selective resource protection methods and tools.
- Potential for some WS methods to take non-target animals.

Alternatives That Were Fully Evaluated

The following Alternatives were developed by the Multi-agency Team to respond to the issues. Three additional alternatives were considered but not analyzed in detail. A detailed discussion of the effects of the alternatives on the issues is described in the EA; below is a summary of the alternatives.

Alternative 1. Non-lethal Wolf Damage Management Only (Current Program) (No Action Program)

The No Action alternative is a procedural NEPA requirement (40 CFR 1502.14(d)), is a viable and reasonable alternative that could be selected, and serves as a baseline for comparison with the other alternatives. The No Action Alternative, as defined here, is the current program and consistent with Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) definition (CEQ 1981). Selecting the No Action Alternative would not result in the cessation of existing practices; that result would be achieved by selection of Alternative 5.

Under this alternative, WS would only provide technical assistance regarding non-lethal techniques, conduct investigations and trap depredating wolves when requested by the WDNR. Captured wolves would be delivered to the WDNR for disposition. The current program is a collection of cooperative agreements with State agencies and private individuals to protect livestock, pets, and public health and safety (described in Chapter 1 of the EA). WS activities have been conducted under a CE on private lands as requested by resource managers or landowners under "Agreements for Control".
Education/extension programs would also be conducted by Wisconsin WS to provide resource owners with assistance and information concerning the use and effectiveness of non-lethal wolf damage management methods. WS would encourage resource owners to use livestock guarding dogs, and other non-lethal methods which could include husbandry, habitat modification, fencing, and electronic guards/frightening devices. WS

would also loan frightening devices to resource owners (when equipment is available) and assist livestock producers in obtaining livestock guarding dogs if requested. Resource owners would be responsible for implementing non-lethal methods. WDNR compensation payments to livestock producers for wolf damage would also continue under this alternative.

Alternative 2. Adaptive Integrated Wolf Damage Management (Proposed Action)

This alternative would allow for a WS Program where wolf damage management would be closely coordinated with the WDNR, other State agencies, USFWS or Tribes, as appropriate. The damage management program would be designed to meet wolf management objectives balanced with the needs of multiple resources (agricultural and natural resources, property and pet owners, and public health and safety). The damage management program analyzed in this alternative would operate according to and in compliance with the conservation goals established for wolves in Wisconsin and strategies outlined in the WWMP (1999), Eastern Wolf Recovery Plan (USFWS 1992) and 50 CFR 17.40(o).

In determining the damage management strategy, preference would be given to practical and effective non-lethal methods. However, non-lethal methods may not always be applied as a first response to each damage problem. The most appropriate response could often be a combination of non-lethal and lethal methods, or there could be instances where application of lethal methods alone would be the most appropriate strategy (see Appendix C or USDA 1997, Appendix J).

Further, education/extension programs would also be conducted by Wisconsin WS to provide resource owners with assistance and information concerning the use and effectiveness of non-lethal wolf damage management methods. Under this alternative, WS would also encourage resource owners to use livestock guarding dogs, and other non-lethal methods which could include husbandry, habitat modification, fencing, and electronic guards/frightening devices. WS would also loan frightening devices to resource owners (when equipment is available) and assist livestock producers in obtaining livestock guarding dogs if requested. Resource owners would be responsible for implementing non-lethal methods. WDNR compensation payments to livestock producers for wolf damage would also continue under this alternative.

WS personnel would minimize the effects on non-target animals T/E species and the environment by utilizing the most selective and effective available methods. The USFWS has concurred that WS wolf damage management activities would have no effect or not likely adversely affect Federally listed animal and bird threatened or endangered (T/E) species in Wisconsin (J. Smith, USFWS letter to D. Nelson, WS, August 12, 2003; L. Lewis, USFWS letter to G. Larson, WS, May 9, 2001). The WDNR has also concurred that WS wolf damage management activities would have no effect or not likely to adverse affect State listed animal and bird T/E species (S. Holtz, WDNR letter to D. Nelson, WS March 23, 2002). Lethal methods would only be used as necessary to prevent or reduce damage after non-lethal methods are considered and used as appropriate.

Alternative 3. Lethal Only Program

Under this alternative, only lethal operational wolf damage management and technical assistance would be provided by WS. Requests for information regarding non-lethal management approaches would be referred to WDNR, USFWS or private businesses or organizations, if appropriate. Individuals or agencies might choose to implement WS lethal recommendations, implement non-lethal methods or other methods not recommended by WS, contract for WS damage management services, use contractual services of private businesses, use volunteer services, or take no action. WS damage management services would be conducted as authorized by various Federal and State regulations. This alternative would not allow WS to consider the use of physical

exclusion, livestock guarding dogs, electronic frightening devices or other non-lethal devices, even where these non-lethal methods may be beneficial. Lethal methods used by WS would include trapping and snaring followed by euthanasia, and shooting.

Shooting would be an effective method to remove a small number of wolves in a damage situation, especially where trapping is not feasible. Shooting could be conducted at night with the aid of spotlights or night-vision equipment.

Traps and snares could be used to capture wolves and lethally remove by euthanasia. A more complete description of these methods is available in Appendix C of the EA and USDA (1997 Appendix J). These techniques are usually implemented by WS personnel because of the training required to use such devices.

Alternative 4. Technical Assistance Only

Under this alternative, WS would not conduct any operational wolf damage management in Wisconsin. The entire WS program would consist of technical assistance, with WS making recommendations when requested. However, private landowners, contractors, or others could conduct their own wildlife damage management on Federal, State, county and private lands under the provisions of the ESA, 4(d) rule regulations of final reclassification rule (50 CFR 17.40(o)), the WWMP (1999) and agencies policies and regulations.

This "technical assistance only" alternative would place the immediate burden of operational wolf damage management work on State agencies, American Indian Tribes, individuals or resources owners. Individuals experiencing wolf damage would, independently or with WS recommendations, carry out and fund control activities. Individual resource owners suffering losses could implement wolf damage management as part of the cost of doing business, or a State agency could assume a more active role in providing operational damage management.

Alternative 5. No WS Wolf Damage Management in Wisconsin.

This alternative would eliminate all WS or any other current Federal program for wolf damage management (operational and technical assistance) on all land classes within Wisconsin. However, State and county agencies and private individuals could conduct wolf damage management. WS would not be available to provide technical assistance or make recommendations to individuals or entities experiencing wolf damage, nor would WS be available to resolve wolf conflicts with operational damage management. Damage management methods applied by non-agency personnel could be used contrary to their intended or legal use, or in excess of what is recommended or necessary due to reduction in oversight and control. Illegal use of pesticides could increase (Schueler 1993). WDNR or local government entities likely would not be adequately funded to provide effective and consistent operational control, which may result in less tolerance for wolves and an increase in the illegal killing of wolves.

A *No Control* alternative was analyzed by the USFWS (USDI 1979) and was dismissed because it was considered an invalid alternative. A *No Control* alternative was also evaluated in USDA (1997) and was also dismissed as an invalid alternative.

Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail are the Following:

Bounties. Payment of funds for killing wildlife (bounties) suspected of causing economic losses is not considered effective to reduce wolf damage at this time. This alternative will not be considered by WS in

detail because:

- WS does not have the authority to establish a bounty program and a bounty system would not be allowed as long as wolves are a listed species.
- Bounties are generally not as effective in reducing damage because depredating individuals/local populations are not specifically targeted.
- Circumstances surrounding take of animals is completely unregulated.
- No effective process exists to prohibit taking of animals from outside the damage management area for compensation purposes.

Eradication and Suppression. An eradication alternative would direct all WS program efforts toward planned, total elimination of wolves. However, this alternative will not be considered by WS in detail because:

- The attempted eradication of established wolf populations would result in a continued or renewed listing under the provisions of the ESA, thus providing increasing levels of State and Federal protection.
- Eradication of wolves is not acceptable to most members of the public.

It is also not realistic, practical, or allowable under present WS policy to consider large-scale population suppression as the basis of the WS program. Typically, WS activities in Wisconsin are conducted on small portions of the area inhabited by depredating species or the species causing a threat to protected resources or public health or safety (See Section 1.4 of this EA).

Damage Management Through Birth Control. Under this alternative, wolf populations would be managed through the use of contraceptives. Wolves would be sterilized or contraceptives administered to limit their ability to produce offspring. However, at present, there are no approved chemical or biological contraceptive agents for wolves. A wolf contraceptive, chemosterilant or immunocontraceptive, if delivered to a sufficient number of individuals, could temporarily suppress local breeding populations by inhibiting reproduction. Reduction of local populations would result from natural mortality and inhibited reproduction. No wolves would be killed directly with this method; however treated wolves may continue to cause damage.

Contraceptive measures for mammals can be grouped into four categories: surgical sterilization, oral contraception, hormone implantation, and immunocontraception (the use of contraceptive vaccines). These techniques would require that wolves receive either single, multiple, or possibly daily treatment to successfully prevent conception. The use of this method would be subject to approval by Federal and State Agencies. This alternative is limited because: (1) it may take a number of years of implementation before the wolf population would decline, and, damage may continue for a number of years; (2) surgical sterilization would have to be conducted by licensed veterinarians, which would therefore be extremely expensive; (3) it is difficult to effectively live trap or chemically capture the number of wolves that would need to be sterilized in order to effect an eventual decline in the population; (4) no chemical or biological agents for contraception of wolves has been approved for use by State and Federal regulatory authorities.

Sterilization may be useful as an experimental technique to reduce depredation in some highly specialized situations in the future. In coyotes, breeding pairs with pups are most likely to depredate on sheep (Till and Knowlton 1983, Till 1992, Bromley and Gese 2001, Blejwas et al. 2002), and the same may be true for wolves and cattle (A. P. Wydeven, WDNR, pers. comm. 2003). Sterilized coyote (Bromley and Gese 2001) and wolf (Mech et al. 1996) packs continue to maintain territories, and do not seem to adversely affect survival of sterilized adults. In chronic areas, sterilization may reduce the need to remove problem wolves by keeping the

wolf population low, and eliminating pup production (Haight and Mech 1997). Sterilization continues to be experimental and would only be done after approval from State and Federal regulatory agencies and if it can be carefully monitored.

The use of sterilization is somewhat limited at this time, and would normally only be done as part of an experimental procedure, in which careful monitoring is done of the treated wolves. Any attempts to sterilize wolves would be initiated by and coordinated with WDNR.

Finding of No Significant Impact

The analysis in the EA indicates that there will not be a significant impact, individually or cumulatively, on the quality of the human environment as a result of this proposed action. I agree with this conclusion and therefore find that an EIS need not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Wolf damage management as conducted by WS in Wisconsin is not regional or national in scope.

2. The proposed action would pose minimal risk to public health and safety.

3. There are no unique characteristics such as park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic areas, or ecologically critical areas that would be significantly affected.

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial. Although there is some opposition to wildlife damage management, this action is not highly controversial in terms of size, nature, or effect.

5. Based on the analysis documented in the EA and the accompanying administrative file, the effects of the proposed damage management program on the human environment would not be significant. The effects of the proposed activities are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

6. The proposed action would not establish a precedent for any future action with significant effects.

7. No significant cumulative effects were identified through this assessment. The number of wolves taken by WS, when added to the total known other take of wolves, falls within levels addressed in the WWMP (1999), Eastern Wolf Recovery Plan (USFWS 1992) and 50 CFR 17.40(o). In addition, WS completed ESA Section 7 Consultation with the USFWS and the WDNR which determined that WS current and proposed wolf damage management program would have no effect or not likely to adversely affect listed species in Wisconsin (J. Smith, USFWS letter to D. Nelson, WS, August 12, 2003; L. Lewis, USFWS letter to G. Larson, WS, May 9, 2001, S. Holtz, WDRN letter to D. Nelson, WS, March 23, 2002).

8. The proposed activities would not affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would they likely cause any loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9. An informal consultation with the USFWS and WDNR confirmed that the proposed action would not likely adversely affect any T/E species (J. Smith, USFWS letter to D. Nelson, WS, August 12, 2003; L. Lewis, USFWS letter to G. Larson, WS, May 9, 2001, S. Holtz, WDRN letter to D. Nelson, WS, March 23, 2002).

10. The proposed action would be in compliance with all federal, state, and local laws imposed for the

protection of the environment.

Decision and Rationale

I have carefully reviewed the EA and the input from the public involvement process. I believe that the issues and objectives identified in the EA are best addressed by selecting Alternative 2 *(Adaptive Integrated Wolf Damage Management* -Proposed Alternative in the EA) and applying the associated mitigation and monitoring measures discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA. The analyses in the EA demonstrate that Alternative 2: 1) best addresses the issues identified in the EA, 2) provides safeguards for public health and safety, 3) provides WS the best opportunity to reduce damage while providing low impacts on wolf and non-target species populations, 4) balances the economic effects to agricultural and natural resources, and property, 5) best meets the objectives set for the program by WS and cooperating agencies/entities, and 6) allows WS to meet its obligations to the WDNR and other agencies or entities. Alternative 2 would also provide the greatest effectiveness and selectivity of methods available, the best cost-effectiveness, has the potential to even further reduce the current low level of risk to the public, pets, and T/E species, and provides for cooperative relationships between WS and other wildlife management agencies/entities. WS will continue to use currently authorized wildlife damage management methods in compliance with all the applicable mitigation measures listed in Chapter 3 of the EA. I have also adopted the Pre-Decisional EA *"Management of Wolf Conflicts and Depredating Wolves in Wisconsin"* as the final.

For additional information regarding this decision, please contact David A. Nelson, USDA-APHIS-WS, 750 Windsor Street, Room 101, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, 53590.

Charles S. Brown
Regional Director
APHIS-WS Eastern Region

10/31/03
Date

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